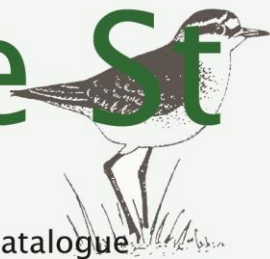


# The St Helena Connection

Issue No 21  
November 2016

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incorporating  
The St Helena Catalogue



official news magazine of the Society of Friends of St Helena

## An Avro RJ100 at St Helena



An Avro RJ100 jet aircraft, operated by Tronos Jet Maintenance and carrying two Atlantic Star Airlines personnel, successfully conducted a technical stop at St Helena Airport on Friday 21 October 2016 – as part of a delivery flight to a customer in Chile.

Arriving close to its schedule at 15.51hrs GMT, the aircraft performed a smooth landing from the south on Runway 02 and, after disembarking a few passengers, took off, completed a circuit, and performed an equally smooth landing from the north on Runway 20. The aircraft departed St Helena on Saturday afternoon at 14.29hrs GMT.

Positive cooperation between various teams enabled Tronos to gain the necessary approvals for this particular delivery flight. On board were 13 passengers, including Richard Brown and Aiden Walsh of Atlantic Star Airlines – one of a number of potential partners with an interest in operating regular flights to St Helena.

### In this issue

- 2 Editorial / Joining the Friends
- 3-5 Matthew Woodthorpe, St Helena Cultural Centre
- 6-8 Andrew Bell, A New ship for St Helena: the Gestation of the RMS *St Helena*
- 9-10 Edward Baldwin, A Visit to the Airport
- 11 The Launch of the RMS by T Hearl, Lunny painting, book Review RMS *St Helena* by John Bryant
- 12-13 An English frigate at anchor off the island of St Helena by Thomas Luny.
- 14 New Exhibit at St Helena Museum
- 15-16 A New Hotel in Jamestown by Edward Baldwin
- 17-18 Historic Departure of the RMS from Tilbury, 14.6.2016 by Edward Baldwin
- 19-20 Visit of His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1957
- 21-22 A Childhood in Two Boats Village by John Woolven-Allan
- 23 Death of tortoise Myrtle. Wirebirds recover numbers
- 24 St Helena's New Marine Protected Area / Restoring Bertrand's Cottage.

**Summer Meeting and AGM 2017:** the next meeting will be held at the Oxford Quaker Meeting House, 42 St Giles, Oxford OX1 3LW on Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> June 2017. Talks in the pipeline include 250 years of tidal recording on St Helena by the National Oceanographic Institute, Liverpool. Further details to follow in the New Year.

## Editorial

Access continues to dominate St Helena's news but it is not clear whether matters have substantially progressed since our last editorial, written some five months ago. The situation has given the press great opportunity to criticise DFID and its aid programme in general or to just lampoon the whole sorry affair (*Private Eye*) as Edward Baldwin reports on page 10. The most significant news was the successful landing of an Avro RJ 100 as we report on the front page. Members will recall Atlantic Star's Richard Brown talking to us at the 2015 autumn meeting and Richard has continued to show an extraordinary commitment to resolving the flight problems, apparently without any financial support from DFID or SHG.

Atlantic Star are of the opinion that the Avro could be fitted with larger fuel tanks which would allow it to reach the African mainland but in what direction – the closer Walvis Bay or further Banjul is not clear. Members at our recent meeting latched onto the old idea of a route through Ascension but there is no evidence that, as Wideawake Airfield's lessee, the USA would be any more willing to discuss regular tourist flights through Ascension than they were when Atkins undertook the feasibility study ten years ago. And of course the massive expenditure involved in filling Dry Gut was made to accommodate larger jets so as to provide easy access for tourists which would give the island an economic base and justify the £200 million construction cost.

DFID's permanent secretary was recently arraigned before the Commons public accounts committee one of whose members, Stephen Phillips MP, particularly took the PS to task pointing out that even Darwin knew there was a wind problem on PBP. It seemed that the island might have found a new champion only for Phillips to resign as an MP two days later over Theresa May's handling of Brexit.

Atlantic Star say they can have a commercial service operating by the spring and it appears that SHG may put the air service back out to tender in the hope of attracting others who may have imaginative ways of making the airport work. It is reasonably certain that a technical solution will be found in due course but what is not certain at all is what a ticket might cost and Richard Brown was careful to avoid this question when asked it by Darrin Henry during his overnight stop on the island with the Avro flight. The RMS is currently scheduled to operate until July 2017 but it is likely that the ship will be given a further reprieve despite apparent interest from enthusiastic potential purchasers.

Our autumn meeting was planned to be our final farewell to the RMS to complement our boat trip on the Thames in the summer. The fact that the ship is still going strong didn't seem to matter too much and Curnow's MD, Andrew Bell, gave a talk on the events leading up to the commissioning of the RMS in 1992 which we report this on p6-8 together with a previously unpublished account of the launch written by Trevor Hearl (p11). Edward Baldwin provides an account of the RMS's "final" departure from Tilbury (p17-18) and also an account of a visit to the airport (p9-10) which is fully operational but lacking planes to deal with.

January 2017 sees the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Duke of Edinburgh's visit to St Helena on the Royal Yacht *Britannia*. We reprint the account of the visit from the *St Helena Wirebird* report of the time together with photos taken by the then education officer Edgar Wagstaff which have not been previously published. It is sad to note that the currently derelict upper Jamestown playground was opened by the Duke during his visit (see p19-20).

In this issue we also have a number of articles relating to the Museum and Cultural Centre. Matthew Woodthorpe provided the autumn meeting with a detailed account of the planning for the Cultural Centre (p3-5). The project is in its infancy and fund raising is likely to be the central issue. Edward Baldwin reports (p14) on the museum staff's archaeological investigations during the development of the hotel at 123 Main St (p15-16) and, as a centre fold, we publish the magnificent painting of the island by Thomas Luny which Edward has acquired for the Museum.

We are also very pleased to publish a third article by John Woolven-Allan. This article covers his childhood at Two Boats and paints a picture of a long lost time of innocence and simplicity. With so much material we have been left with only limited space for short pieces on the island's new Marine Protected Reserve, the demise of Myrtle the tortoise and a welcome recovery in the health of the wirebird population. We would have liked to have included a picture of St James's new steeple, erected in steel some fifty years after the removal of the old stone clad one, but unfortunately space did not permit.

## The St Helena Connection

*The St Helena Connection* aims to provide news and information on people and current and historical events of interest to anyone with connections to the Island of St Helena. All contributions welcome. Please contact the editor: **Ian Mathieson, Callender House, 90, Callender St, Ramsbottom, Lancs BLO 9DU.** T 01706-826467. Email [imathieson2000@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:imathieson2000@yahoo.co.uk)

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## Joining the Friends or Subscribing to the St Helena Connection

### Membership

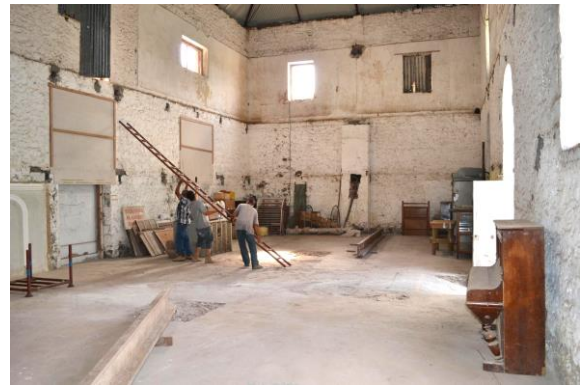
To join the Friends please contact the Membership Secretary, Margaret Dyson on [subscriptions@sthelena.uk.net](mailto:subscriptions@sthelena.uk.net) Annual Membership is £20.00 per person. Life Membership £350.00. *The St Helena Connection* is published twice a year in June (after the AGM) and December. It comes as a benefit of membership together with a copy of our magazine *Wirebird* which focusses on island history.

### The Friends of St Helena

President: the Earl of Iveagh  
Chairman: Ian Mathieson  
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Secretary: Brian Frederick  
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*The St Helena Connection* Editor: Ian Mathieson  
*Wirebird* Editor: Colin Fox  
Web Manager: Margaret Dyson  
Committee Members: Edward Baldwin, Vicky Beal, Chris Newman, Trevor Reynolds, Patricia Young and Matthew Woodthorpe.

# The St Helena Cultural Centre by Matthew Woodthorpe



## The Vision

### 1. What 'type' of cultural centre is SHCC?

A community led project for preserving the heritage and social history of St Helena and promoting education and enjoyment of island culture.

### 2. What role does the SHCC play for Saints?

- The SHCC will offer schools, residents and institutions a modern purpose made resource.
- Preserve the archives in a modern temperature controlled environment.
- Provide a modern library - focused on providing better access to learning opportunities.
- Provide more space for the museum.

### 3. What international role does the SHCC play?

- It will be the pre-eminent tourist focus on the Island at the centre of Jamestown.
- It will provide an ideal institutional and research interface.
- It will provide a positive outward impression of St Helena.

## What is the Brief?

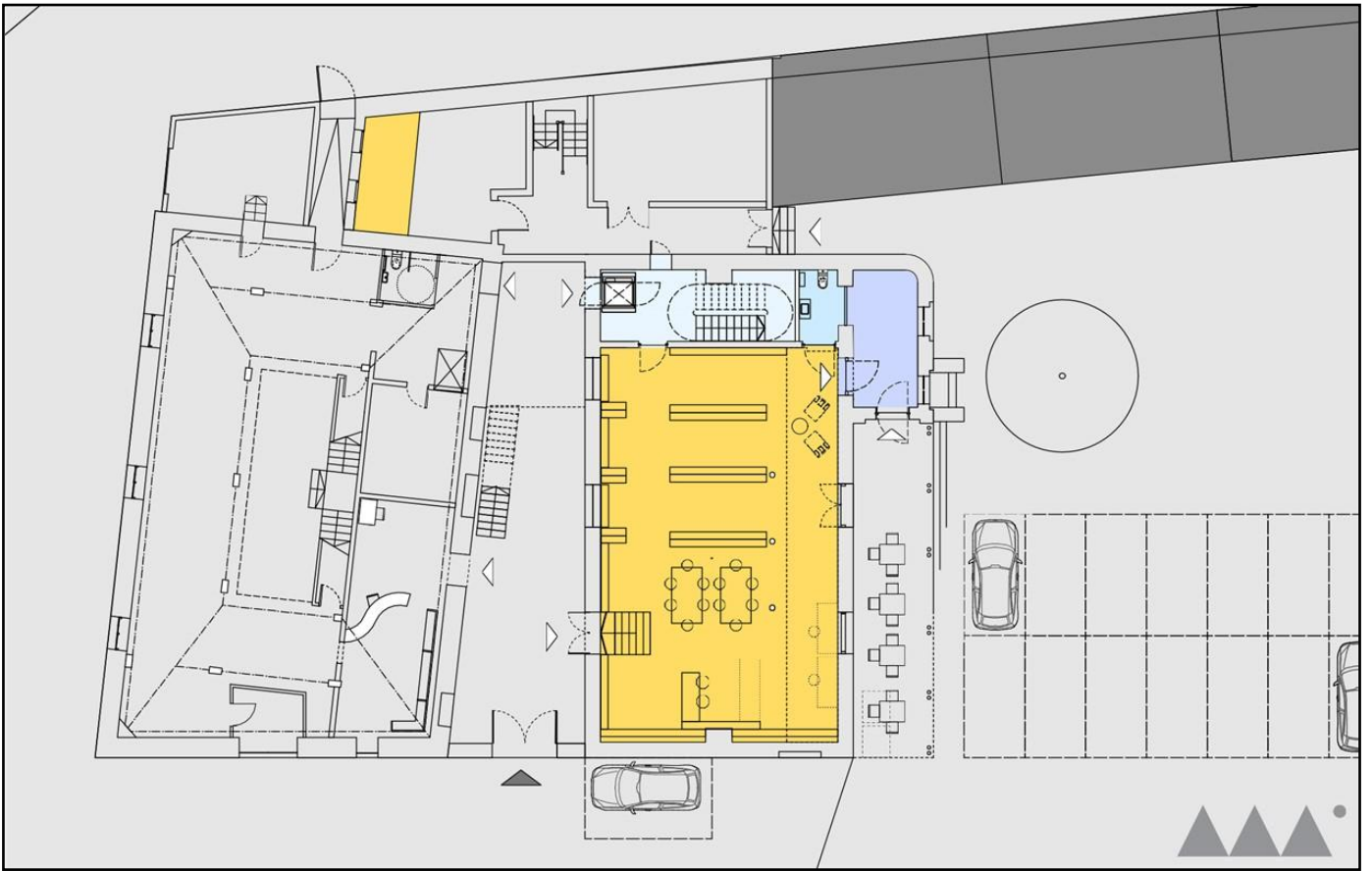
### 1. To bring together three institutions under one roof as the new St Helena Cultural Centre located in the refurbished PWD store which is annexed to the existing Museum. The SHCC will house:

- The St Helena Museum
- The Government Archives
- The Jamestown Library

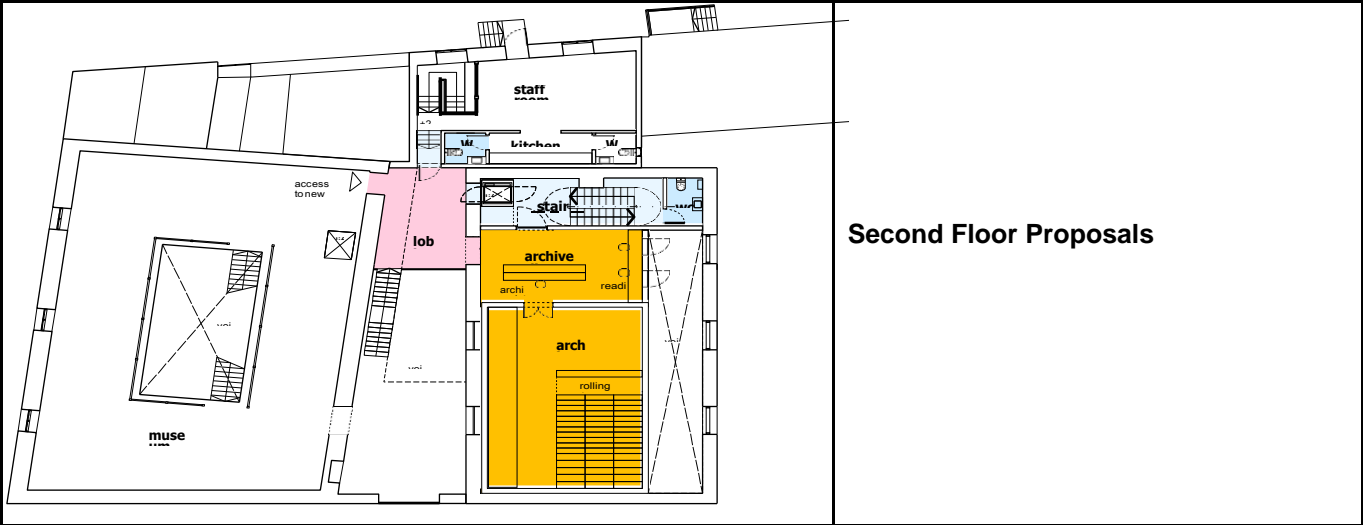
### 2. To allow institutions to share resources, whilst operating and being managed independently.

3. To provide increased capacity to the Museum through a new gallery in the PWD store, to fit an existing archival system and to provide increased capacity for the library
4. To provide an entrance with a ramp at ground floor, and consolidate access points so that the building can be easily managed and secured.
5. To provide a humidity controlled and secure environment for the archives
6. To solve humidity and other environmental issues within the existing building
7. To retain the St Helena Museum in its current form and to maintain the 'gallery' as a flexible space for lectures and exhibitions

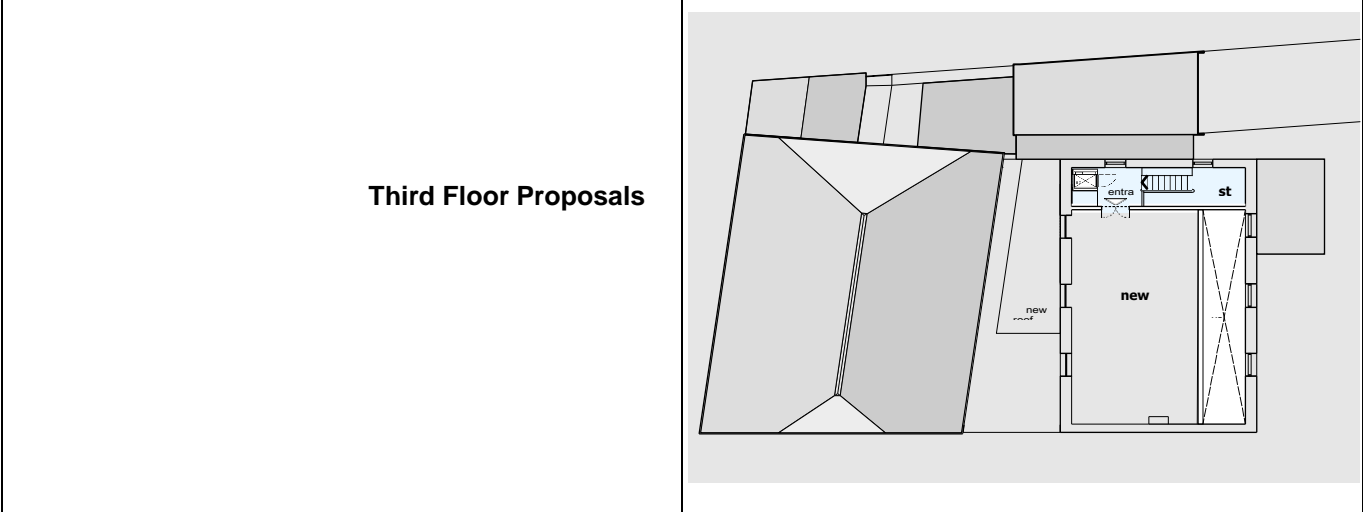




Ground Floor Proposals – Existing Museum and Annex to left Proposed Extension (PWD store) in yellow.



Second Floor Proposals



Third Floor Proposals

## Next Steps

### 1. Vision Statement

This will have a story attached to it that will be used to pitch the project.

### 2. Project Programme

A project manager who will put together a time line, set out targets for key activities to take place and performance indicators to track the success of the project.

### 3. Business Plan

A plan put together by all three institutions that will cover management of the building, operational requirements and financial strategies for running SHCC.

### 4. Construction Cost Plan

A plan outlining how the project will be funded. This needs to include salaries for consultants now to the actual construction of the building. Gardiner & Theobald will put together an initial construction valuation.

### 5. Fund Raising

A plan put together by a consultant to target funding potential, working with organisers and volunteers to set up events and with marketing to create material.

### 6. Marketing and PR

A strategy to disseminate the story of the SHCC, the production of marketing material off and online.

### 7. Hard Copy Marketing Material

- Marketing brochure for funders
- Posters & information boards
- Souvenirs and guerrilla tactic marketing

### 8. Online Marketing Material

- Dedicated website
- SHCC newsletter
- Social media: facebook, twitter, blogs, etc

### 9. Possible Funding Streams

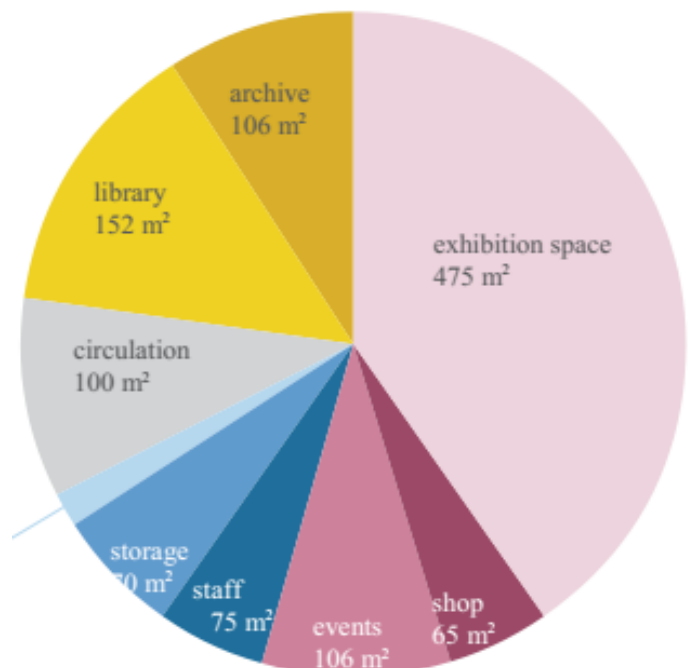
- Public and government funding streams
- Other cultural organisations
- Philanthropic individuals
- Fund-raising events
- Reading Sports
- Music festivals, exhibitions, meals, etc
- Online crowd funding:
  - Kickstarter, crowdcube, etc

### 10. Funding by Theme

- Cultivation of culture and the arts
- Architectural heritage and conservation
- Education
- Projects for community benefit
- Preservation and dissemination of archival documents
- British Overseas Territories histories
- Slave trade history
- Napoleonic themes



The Proposed Library

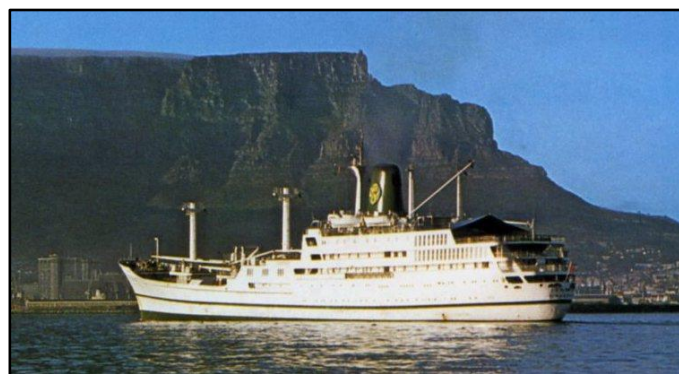


Total areas by use 1,180 m<sup>2</sup> (WC 20 m<sup>2</sup>, pale blue wedge)

## A New Ship for St Helena: The Gestation of the RMS by Andrew Bell



Curnow Shipping always knew that the original *St Helena*, built in Vancouver in 1963 with a gross tonnage of 3,150 tons, was too small to serve St. Helena and Ascension Island, from terminal ports at either end of a 6,000 mile route between Avonmouth (Bristol) and Cape Town. The vital requirement after the abdication of the Union Castle Line in October 1977 was to get a replacement ship into service as quickly as possible. This was achieved within ten months. During the "Old" RMS's charter to the MoD during the Falklands conflict and after (May 1982 to September 1983) once again there was an urgent need for a replacement ship. My previous employers (1957-1974) Ocean Transport & Trading had just retired their 1964 built, 7,070 gross tons *Centaur* from the trade for which she had been built - Western Australia to Singapore and Malaysia. Curnow arranged a time charter and provided the hotel services crew. The charter ran from September 1982 to December 1983 and gave St Helena a taste of what a bigger ship could provide. Unabashed Curnow fuelled this desire on St Helena and also suggested how it could be done whilst keeping the ODA in the picture. In 1986 Governor Dick Baker initiated the trail that led to the New RMS. This became public when, one Sunday morning, he made a phone call to me. This was confirmed in a telex on the Monday. This succinct document, always referred to by us at Curnow as "the Purple Telex", set the parameters for a ship to be newly built and Curnow's role in construction. This was something that was to later settle many an argument. The new ship was to be provided by the British government, under aid funding, to St Helena with a twenty year net subsidy and with no capital repayment - a very generous package. The involvement of Curnow Shipping was to stand for three years after delivery. Tactically this sustained Curnow's increasingly important plan to create a cadre of islanders to man their own ship at all levels.

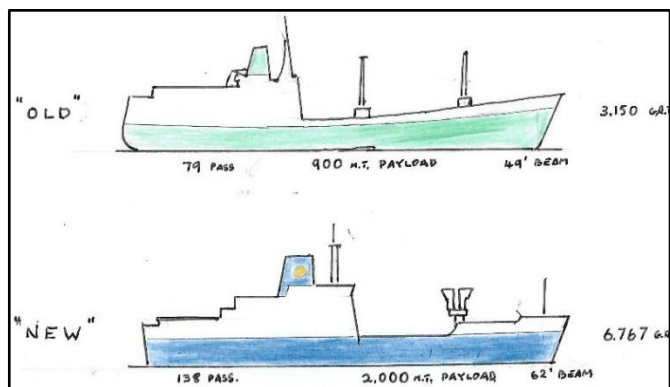


**The Centaur**

Three Quays Marine Services, at that time a subsidiary of P&O, won the tender to design and superintend the building of the new ship. Curnow had previously used another firm of naval architects, Burness Corlett of Basingstoke, who were quite sure that the contract was theirs but I had warned them not to be too greedy - but they were. During the summer of 1986 Three Quays rapidly got to work. ODA backed Curnow's idea that two successive consultative sessions should be held on-board the Old RMS when the ship was at Avonmouth. These took place on Saturdays and there was an open invitation to anyone involved in the St Helena service - everyone from crew members to port agents, from cargo shippers and travel agents through to SHG's UK Rep. Even insurance underwriters and HM Customs came along and not just lured by an alcohol free lunch. The sea staff were particularly expansive and contributed much data and many ideas. Ideas came from not just the Old RMS and experience gained from the *Centaur* but also from those with Union Castle experience since Curnow had been greatly

helped by some of that Line's former staff who were now employed by us. Many will remember those star pursers Colin Deller, Jeannie Rollins and Geoff Shallcross and the invaluable services of Dusty Miller training catering crew members to the highest standards. Ten weeks after the first meeting a second was held and this time the centre piece was Three Quays presenting their interpretation of what the outline design could be with as many as possible of "the good ideas" that the naval architects could include. There was plenty of debate but the conclusion was a surprising degree of agreement. This enabled Three Quays to complete the definitive design very quickly with the Department of Transport and Lloyds Register of Shipping's approval. Curnow insisted that once this was done there were to be no further amendments to the design. In fact several were made during the building of the ship but these were initiated by a very special person of whom mention is made later on in this story.

The main design principles were based on two-thirds of island imports coming from the UK and one third from South Africa and also the need for a widely priced range of single class of passenger accommodation sharing all the public facilities. The ship had to be able to carry 25,000 tons of cargo and around 2,500 passengers in a year. A seaworthy shaped hull had to be able to tackle the infamous Cape Rollers and the winter storms in the North Atlantic while maintaining a speed of 14 knots. This was to be done with twin diesel engines driving twin propellers. All the accommodation had to be air conditioned with no recirculation of processed air.



**Basic Specifications of the Old and New RMS's (the main photo's angle distorts the length of the Old RMS which is almost the same for both ships).**

Inter-island passengers were to be berthed in cabins specified to be better than British Rail's 1<sup>st</sup> Class sleepers. Curnow insisted that there should be capacity to generate as much fresh water as the ship would reasonably need and experience of this type of plant had been gained by the Old RMS having it fitted when she had been in the Falklands. Another lesson from this period was the importance of having the latest Satcom system. Retractable fin-like stabilisers had become well proved so they were specified too. Cargo spaces were designed to provide container stowage and special features included a space for animals to be carried under shelter. Two cranes would be sited to handle all the cargo carried and capable of being linked together to handle heavy lifts.

Suggestions that were made at the Avonmouth meetings included having the dining saloon, the main galley and the store rooms all on the same deck with the stores loaded through their own hatchway. The main lounge was able to seat all the passengers at one time. Adjacent to the swimming pool there needed to be a sun lounge with bar served by a full-scale pantry with a supply lift from the main galley and stores. Something really new at that time was a cabin with facilities for two disabled passengers and also a dedicated children's room with stowage for toys and games. The shop had to have its own storage area and it would have been nice to have a hairdresser but experience operating the *Centaur* proved that this was uneconomic. A whole host of details went into the design such

as one bathroom for the use of elderly passengers, the Radio Room opening onto the Bridge and the officers' lounge to be capable of hosting private parties. My particular contribution was passenger baggage handling into the accommodation through a platform in the stores hatch which was copied from the same feature on New Zealand Shipping's *Rangi* liners. I also proposed adjacent to the two cadets' cabins a four berth students' cabin which was intended to take Prince Andrew Schools' senior students on trips to Ascension and Cape Town. The idea never caught on but the cabin was useful for berthing supernumeraries who included Royal Navy junior officers needing deep-sea time, whose presence, as part of the ship's company, added much to the enjoyment of those on-board. It was no coincidence that these three cabins were located adjoining the area in which the senior officers were accommodated.

Arguments lost by Curnow during the design stage included the choice of whose main engines were installed. We wanted them built by F. Allen but ODA had experience of Mirlees engines as aid packaged power stations. The hull should be designed to be able to be lengthened in the cargo area – jumboised – although it was never done probably because of extra cost. There was a long-running disagreement between Curnow and Solomons over the proportion of single and multi-berth cabins. The compromise was simply to divide the numbers each party wanted!

Three Quays circulated the specification but there was little interest from shipbuilders. The smaller UK yards who tendered were Brooke Marine at Lowestoft, Govan Shipbuilders on the Clyde and Hall Russell at Aberdeen. Govan were favourites at £26m as they were building the *Norsea*, a 31,000 t passenger ferry for North Sea Ferries. There was doubt about Brooke Marine who had never built anything larger than the *Bolton Abbey* 30 years previously. Hall Russell, at £19m, were widely considered to be far too cheap and the price was seen as politically motivated. HM Treasury ruled for Hall Russell and stated that "if you don't place the order at Aberdeen you won't get the money".

There now comes into a leading role in the story Clive Warren, a man of great spirit and resolve who at the time was ODA's head of section for the British Overseas Territories in the South Atlantic. Sensing that the Scottish Office was behind this choice of Hall Russell he wrung a *quid pro quo* from them – all legally signed and binding – that if there was a cost overrun the Scottish Office would pay. He was well advised by the Crown Agents who were the funding conduit to Hall Russell. Clive had a dedication to St Helena and its people that can best be described as driving and purposeful and all done with a sharp good humour.

The contract was signed in London in December 1987 but as early as February 1988 it was sensed that Hall Russell were in trouble. With the ship the only one on their order book, steel, other materials and components were pouring into the yard lying almost in the centre of the "Granite City". The keel was laid by Mrs Gay Denbow (SHG's UK Rep) in June 1988. It was a large piece of the mid-ships hull's fuel tanks forward of the engine room and was placed on the keel blocks on one of which Gay had placed a St Helena crown coin – it was vaporised when 5,000 tonnes of steel slid over it at the time of the launch. Dick and Connie Baker, by then in retirement, were there to see the ceremony.

The worst happened in early November 1988 with Hall Russell being placed in receivership. Taking the lead from Clive Warren in all but name, Three Quays were left managing the yard and building the ship which ODA were definite about continuing. The possibility of the order being abandoned was considered with breaking the ship up on the stocks but the ship was around 20% complete. Clive Warren with the Crown Agents worked on the receivers to fund the work force and keep the construction going. A key event was the delivery of the two huge main engines, swathed in PVC. This was a visible act of confidence. Only six weeks after the bank had acted on 23<sup>rd</sup> December ODA invited bids for the yard. Working over the Christmas holidays

Clive Warren, with his man at the Crown Agents and guided by Three Quays, chose the A&P Group (owned by Peter de Savery) and a new contract was negotiated to finish the ship. All this was done without a day's construction work being lost.

Curnow Shipping from the earliest days had an engineer and a deck officer in the yard at Aberdeen. Once a month members of Curnow Shipping's management met at Aberdeen in what some people called contemptuously "the curtains committee". Ron Baxter, with his wife Pat, did the master plan for all the interior décor and did so based on a great deal of experience. A true Ulsterman, Ron had started his career in the famous yard of Harland and Wolff in 1943 and by 1955 was the manager charged with building Union Castle's *Pendennis Castle*. He so impressed the ship's owners that they offered him a career on the technical staff of British and Commonwealth Shipping, who were better known as Union Castle and Clan Line. Retiring early Ron set up his own company. I had first been impressed with the Baxters' work that had produced the muted splendour of the interior of Trinity House's flagship *Patricia* which, still in service, has acted as a Deputy Royal Yacht at times. An example of Ron's worldly wisdom was that he advised us to order not less than 20% overrun on all the major items of soft furnishing materials so that well into the RMS's lifetime we had the match of just what was being replaced. Some of the public room carpeting was especially woven for the new ship. Bob Wilson, the senior of our two radio officers, was given charge of just what was required and went where in the Radio Room which resulted in what I would claim to have been the most effective and habitable one afloat. Many of the pictures in the ship were reproductions from Trevor Hearl's private St Helena collection. He was very generous in giving access to what we thought we wanted and, it was only after we had assembled the images to be reproduced and framed by modest copy/printing works in the middle of Bridgenorth that, we found out that the company also worked for the Royal Collection based at Windsor Castle.

Clive Warren got a lot of satisfaction in being involved in the building of the ship that he was responsible for... and saved. This often meant him attending the monthly progress meeting. On one of these as we toured the ship as she was fitting out after the launch. We were in what was becoming the C deck, economy grade cabins and he asked why there was no natural light. The answer was "no portholes". "Can they be fitted to the outboard ship's side cabins" "Yes". "Let's have portholes where possible". Three Quays were very keen to show a number of features they had designed for the *Norsea* so off to Hull we travelled where she was turning around from having come in from Rotterdam. Looking aft from the bridge on a cold bright morning - it had rained and the bare steel deck stretching aft had contracted in the temperature and looked like a rutted country lane. "Is that what a steel deck can look like? We cannot have that around the swimming pool. What is the alternative?" Came the chorus "timber" and that is why the RMS might be the last merchant ship built in a British yard that has a teak deck. It seems to be wearing well.

The launch took place on a windy Tuesday 31<sup>st</sup> October 1989. The ship was to have been named by the Duchess of York but, with her father dying on his ranch in Argentina, she was substituted by Prince Andrew who flew himself to Aberdeen from his RN ship, then on the west coast of Scotland. The St Helenian community came from far and wide to see their ship slide out of the vast building shed into the *Dee* and nudged to the nearby



fitting out berth. Also there was Governor Robert Stimson but we never knew why Peter de Savery was absent. Curnow had little to do with organising the ceremony – unlike that when Princess Margaret named the Old RMS at Southampton in September 1978 – all we did was charter the British Midland jet that carried the London guests to the occasion. It nearly did not make it for Dyce Airport was affected that morning by, of all things, wind shear!



**Above Prince Andrew launching the RMS and below the hull sliding into the River Dee**

Eleven months late and £13m over the contracted price, Rodney Young (the ship's Second Officer and most senior islander on-board) signed for the delivery on 30<sup>th</sup> October 1990 after three weeks of satisfactory trials. No ship is ever finished in the builders' yard and the last details were completed by A&P Falmouth. The RMS embarked its first passengers, invited for the overnight trip to Cardiff. It was a rough passage but it showed that the hull shape was sea kindly, the stabilisers were effective in reducing rolling and the design almost eliminated vibration. So that some fittings and furnishing could be transferred the two RMS's were berthed stern to stern at Cardiff. It was the only time they ever met. When she sailed on 14<sup>th</sup> November 1990, the new RMS's career began.

## A Visit to the Airport by Edward Baldwin



### The Airside Entrance with "Arrivals" in the Distance

Although at present not operational, the St Helena Airport is complete and working and available for small charter aircraft to use. A business jet brought three Belgian tourists for a 24 hour stay in July. These were St Helena's first airborne tourists and were acknowledged as such. There are also occasional Basil Read and medivac charters. The only construction continuing on site is the completion of the fuel storage facility.



### Control Tower

While in this state of limbo, the Airport is hosting open days every other Wednesday. The café, where a good value lunch may be enjoyed, and the gift shop are opened and tours of the control tower and meteorology facility are conducted. Visitors may also take a bus ride to both ends of the runway and experience the wind at the north end for themselves. This also gives an impressive view of the East India Company battery just below the threshold, as well as one of Prosperous Bay Beach.

As *Private Eye* has stated, this all seems eminently good value for money for a £285m investment! <sup>1</sup>



### The View from the Control Room

In the terminal building, it feels quite surreal being permitted to wander in and out of what in an operational airport are secure, no-go areas, not to mention stepping out, unrestrained through the departure gates onto the aircraft parking apron! Additionally some lucky children get to ride in the enormous fire tenders.



### Check-in



### Fire Truck

The Tower, to say the least, is impressive. It is a handsome building and fully staffed and functional at all times. The views of the site from the airport control suite at the top are of course impressive, and it is from here that one can appreciate the full beauty of the runway and other features. Basil Read have done a splendid job tidying up the site and re-landscaping areas around the concrete. King and Queen Rocks, topped by the Prosperous Bay Signal Station look particularly impressive. This of course was the scene of St Helena's last murder for which the death penalty was imposed, the Crowie cousins who were convicted, being hanged and buried in our Museum! The Tower personnel are happy to explain their instruments and displays and even demonstrate the touch screen which controls the runway, apron and other lights. There is real-time weather data displayed, both locally on the ground and on the approaches. All the equipment is of course state of the art.

On the deck below is the Met Office, with almost as good a view and staffed by a full time member of the UK Meteorological Office. They are collecting weather data round the clock and forwarding it to the UK by satellite for analysis, and have recently added a LIDAR instrument to their tool kit. This will be moved around the site and is capable of recording wind conditions at a variety of altitudes. All this data collection should ultimately facilitate operational protocols to be devised to enable safe operation of airliners, but this will take time.

The traffic islands and roundabout by the terminal have been extensively planted with endemics, including dwarf ebony and hairgrass. A large naval pattern anchor, which was formerly at the Middle Steps in Jamestown, has been placed here at the suggestion of the Museum, after extensive restoration. This is particularly appropriate, as an anchor features on the Airport's logo.

The Airport road is also an impressive feat of engineering. Only the section from Bottom Woods to the Airport is open to the public at present. It is of course the finest piece of road on the Island, with sweeping curves and smooth gradients. The stretch between Bottom Woods and the Millennium Forest is being carefully landscaped with generous plantings of endemics on both sides, and a well-reconstructed section of the old wall around the Great Wood. There is a speed limit of 40mph, but the temptation is to drive much faster!

<sup>1</sup> The full *Private Eye* quote is: "The airport is running open days every fortnight in which punters can enjoy a guided tour of the entire airport as well as a bus trip along the runway to view either end and take photographs. Gwyneth Howell, head of airport operations, says "many airports around the world cannot accommodate open days like these due to traffic and operational requirements". Also, as the St Helena Government has been quick to announce, "St. Paul's Primary School pupil, Lewis Caesar, was really impressed with the layout of the terminal building, with other schoolchildren describing the whole experience as 'really cool.'" So, £285m well spent then."



Road Layouts and an Old Naval Anchor Brought up from Jamestown

## Launch of the RMS St Helena

"I name this ship ST.HELENA". Prince Andrew's clear voice rang round the old Hall Russell shipyard at Aberdeen, champagne splashed across the ship's bows and the towering grey, blue and white hull began - after a breath-taking pause - to slide gracefully into the waiting water with cheers resounding from hundreds of spectators. As she swung slowly round, gleaming in the soft autumnal sunshine, tears of emotion moistened many an eye for it had been a memorable and moving occasion.

The ceremony had started early in the afternoon of 31st October to the sound of music from the Regimental Band of the 1st Battalion The Gordon Highlanders. Scores of guests gathered on the launch platform, including students and officials from St.Helena as well as representatives of every Island interest in the UK, while shipyard workers began knocking away the wooden supports that held the huge hull, seemingly precariously, in check. Meanwhile The Duke of York had arrived to be welcomed at the shipyard by Aberdeen's Lord Lieutenant. The Prince mounted the platform wearing a fine floral boutonhole presented by little Emma Isaac, who then proudly joined the royal party while the Ship's Blessing was given by Rev.Stewart Todd.

After the launch the Prince went to talk to shipyard workers and their families for whom the building of the ship had meant so much. For they had gone through anxious times with the decline of the century-old shipbuilders Hall Russell, before the order for the completion of the St Helena under the management of A.& P.Appledore Ltd., had revived the yard's fortunes.

Fitting-out and sea-trials will take some months before the new RMS can go into South Atlantic service. When, at a splendid Scottish reception, the St Helena guests met their ship-builder hosts, the speeches and toasts, as well as the talk, focussed not surprisingly on the island and its ships. Prince Andrew, responding to a toast proposed by Jim Nielsen, Chairman of A.& P. Appledore, recalled his island visit in 1984 with great affection as "the best of the many days I have spent in the South Atlantic." Spicing his short speech with witty asides relished by his audience, he recognised that St Helena governors and ships did not always get along well together - an allusion not lost in that company - so he had felt some unease that afternoon as he waited for the launch fearing, he said, that "it might slip quietly away while Dr.Todd was still pronouncing his blessing."

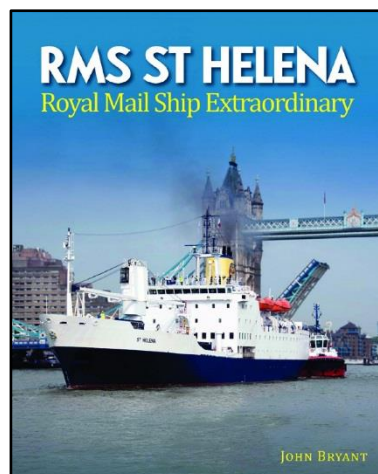
In thanking Prince Andrew Governor Robert Stimson spoke feelingly of islanders' affection for the Royal family. The island had taken Prince Andrew especially to its heart and were proud that its splendid new high school bore his name. For this "very precious ship" the Governor wished particularly to thank HMG and the shipbuilders who, despite difficulties and anxieties, saw it successfully launched on time. Stressing its vital importance to "some 6,000 British people" isolated in the South Atlantic, Mr Stimson eagerly looked forward to seeing the new RMS "lying in James' Bay...an extension of our island community." Mrs Stimson then presented HRH with a St Helena lace tablecloth and a Prince Andrew School tie "as a small token of appreciation from the people of St Helena".

Responding to the toast Alistair Lambie, Managing Director of Appledores spoke of their pride in building this new Royal Mailship for Britain's South Atlantic communities. It had also brought particular satisfaction to those engaged in its construction for ensuring the future of their historic shipyard. Thus it was of unique significance for both communities.

Prince Andrew examined a model of the ship with some of the officials present and also took the opportunity informally to meet several St Helenian guests but nothing could show his interest and pleasure better, perhaps, than the fact that HRH stayed much longer than planned. Superlatives abounded as guests bade farewell. Scotland had made it a truly memorable, and momentous, occasion for St Helena.

*Trevor W. Hearl 2.11.89 (and previously unpublished)*

## Just Published: John Bryant's *RMS St Helena: Royal Mail Ship Extraordinary*



This book's publication was commissioned to coincide with the expected retirement of the RMS from South Atlantic Service. Subsequent events have made it about a year too soon but this doesn't alter the fine quality of the book, particularly the range of photographs which have been published in the widely known and colourful Ferry Publications format.

Author John Bryant has assembled an enjoyable history of the ship together with good descriptions of life on board for crew and passengers alike which covers the period from 1977, and the end of the Union Castle Line, up to the present and beyond with speculations about the ship's life after South Atlantic retirement as and when she gets it.

This is a complementary title to Bob Wilson's recently re-published histories of the RMS which are written and illustrated more from a crew's perspective whereas John Bryant has successfully captured the feel of the ship from the passenger's view and thus reflects the great affection so many people feel for this great vessel.

Bryant, John *RMS St Helena: Royal Mail Ship Extraordinary*. Ferry Publications, 2016. 96pp, large format full colour softback. £17.50 inc p&p from Miles Apart. [lmathieson2000@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:lmathieson2000@yahoo.co.uk).

## An English frigate at anchor off the island of St Helena, with a view of Jamestown beyond by Thomas Luny

This picture (shown overleaf) was recently purchased by Edward Baldwin at a Bonhams auction for £10,000 and will become a fitting companion to the Museum of St Helena's oil by William Huggins, donated by Trevor Hearl. It is a large painting being 166 cm wide and 108 cm high.

**Thomas Luny (1759–1837)**, born in Cornwall, probably at St Ewe, was a prolific marine painter. At the age of eleven he left Cornwall to live in London and was apprenticed to Francis Holman, who would have a long lasting artistic influence. Luny remained until 1780 in Holman's studio, first situated in Broad Street, St. George's and later relocated to Old Gravel Lane.

After leaving Holman's studio, Luny moved to Leadenhall Street during 1783 from where he was frequently exhibiting at the Royal Academy. In a total of twenty-nine exhibitions between 1780 and 1802. In Leadenhall Street, Luny became acquainted with a "Mr. Merle", a dealer and framer who promoted Luny's paintings for over twenty years, to great success. Luny also found a wealthy source of business in Leadenhall Street, where the EIC had their headquarters; their officers commissioned many paintings and ship portraits from him. This relationship between the Company and Luny also had several non-monetary benefits, for it seems probable that, considering the great detail and realistic look of many of his sketches of locations such as Naples, Gibraltar, and Charleston, South Carolina, that Luny was occasionally invited as a guest on the Company's ships on special occasions and voyages. Whether he actually visited St Helena, we do not know. He was later to use this panorama as a background to several ship portraits of Eastindiamen.



**An English frigate at anchor off the island of St Helena, with a view of Jamestown beyond by Thomas Luny**

Signed at lower left "T Luny, 1788". Oil on canvas, 87 x 146 cm.

## New Exhibits at St Helena Museum

Filled with fascinating island history, the St Helena Museum holds historical artefacts from the 1600s to today, uniting the past and present of St Helena. There are two notable new additions to the Museum's collection that shouldn't be missed, one showcasing Boer relics and the other portraying the old RMS St Helena and the part she played in the 1982 Falklands Campaign.

### Expanded Boer Exhibit

With South African company, Basil Read, assigned the task of building the Airport, St Helena witnessed an influx of South African residents. This led to an increased interest in the Island's Boer history and connections with the African continent.

The Museum's Boer exhibit has been developed to cater for this interest, and has been expanded to include handmade tools and wooden objects crafted by the Boers.

Explaining the newly displayed objects, Museum Director, Adam Sizeland, said "when the Boers came to St Helena they were prisoners and made their tools themselves; and from those tools they made boxes, carvings and picture frames all from island wood, some with intricate patterns. Things made from beef bones include cutlery, rings and pipes for smoking. They were very creative, inventive and resourceful people.



### RMS St Helena and the Falklands Conflict

The second new permanent exhibit is inspired by the old RMS St Helena and the part that the ship and her crew played in the 1982 Falklands Conflict.

When the RMS St Helena made her historical voyage to the UK in June this year a collection of war memorabilia was presented to St Helena Line, and Captain Rodney Young decided it should be donated to the Museum together with some Falklands souvenirs from the RMS.

The new exhibit includes a model of the old RMS St Helena with the helicopter pad, along with old RMS photos taken by Radio Officer Bob Wilson.

Another piece on show is a replica of the campaign medal presented to all participants in the Falklands war. This was controversially only presented to the Saints two years ago, their efforts having originally been overlooked due to arriving after the battle had ceased. However, the contribution to the clear-up operation, with the RMS acting as a support vessel to mine hunters clearing Argentinian mine fields, eventually earned them their medal.



### Archaeological Dig on Main Street

Another recent project undertaken by the Museum was an archaeological dig on Main Street to assist St Helena Hotel Development. The developers approached the Museum to undertake a Heritage Impact Assessment to ensure no damage came to any historical artefacts and human remains that might be present beneath the development, documented as a possible site of the Portuguese chapel and graveyard.

After digging by hand for fifteen days no sign of a grave site was discovered. However Museum representatives did find ceramics, pottery, animal bones, iron and metal that show signs of continuous habitation.



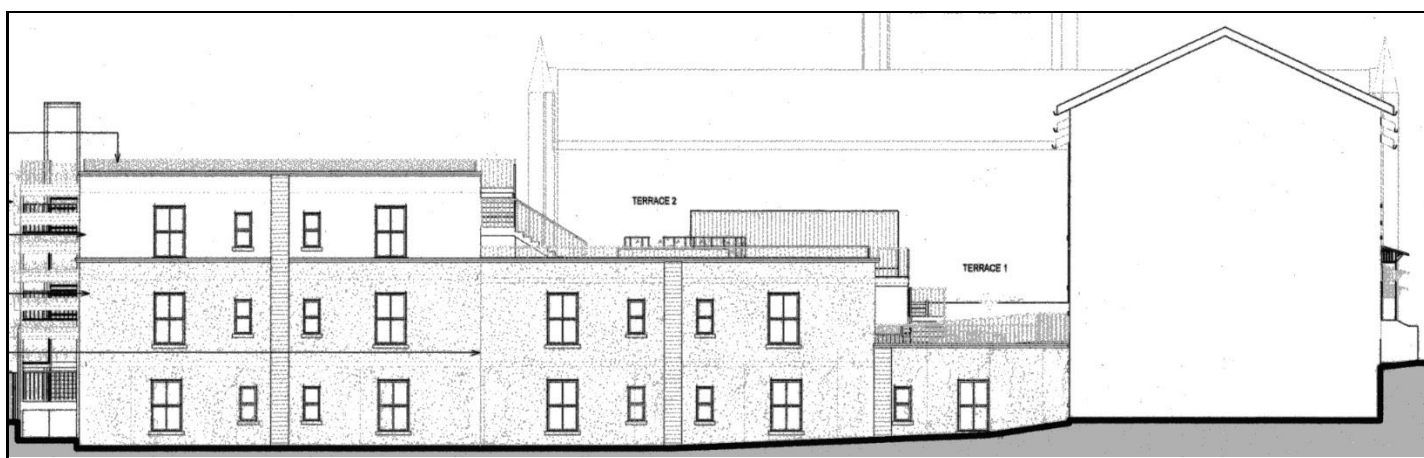
One particularly significant find was a large circular water feature, a basin eight foot in diameter built of stone masonry pointed with hard lime. The discovery suggests this was the site for the public fresh drinking water supply from a channel up stream. Another pit revealed a curved wall and from this it is assumed the basin overflowed into a larger one where locals bathed next to the church. It is now assumed that this was once the social centre of Jamestown, and the site was probably the most continuously inhabited place on St Helena. There appears to be no mention of this on the maps as they predate the buildings in the development zone, helping the Museum to write a new piece of history.

*St Helena Tourism*

# A New Hotel in Jamestown by Edward Baldwin



Front (Main St) Elevation



South-east Elevation

*Drawings of the building are copyright FDT Architects*

St Helena Government has set up a holding company, St Helena Hotel Development Corporation, to finance, build and own a new high grade hotel in lower Jamestown. This is being developed from the three Georgian houses known as 1, 2, 3 Main Street, for a long time a Government property. An additional three storey wing is being constructed in what were the back gardens. The total number of suites and rooms will be 30 providing 60 beds. The chosen designer and operator is the prestigious Mantis Developments of South Africa (see SHC 14). They operate the high-end Mantis Collection properties Worldwide.

Construction work is being managed by Agmac Construction, also of South Africa, though much of the specialist work is subcontracted to local firms and local labour is being employed. The contractors are on a steep learning curve, as they had little experience of traditional mud-and-stone building methods. They are proving resilient and determined to do things properly.

A strip-out of the old houses has been carried out, the 1960s concrete additions to the rear and the surviving mud-and-stone garden wall being demolished. The Museum has been appointed to carry out a watching brief on demolition and excavation works, and has dug archaeological test pits, in accordance with the requirements of the grant of planning permission. This is an important role, as the location is one of the earliest occupied sites on the island, being where the Portuguese erected the first chapel, the area being used as a burial ground up until around 1700. Sadly no traces of the early chapel or churches have been found, nor the early graveyard. These are obviously deeply buried by material brought down the valley by the floods frequently referred to in the early records.

**St Helena Connection No 21**

While digging the test pits we made an interesting discovery. In the second 1m square by 1m+ deep test pit, we found part of a curious curved wall, which could not be immediately explained. It was situated just below the lowest 18<sup>th</sup> century occupation layer relating to the three houses, at a depth of just over one metre, so clearly pre-dated them. It was constructed of carefully selected flat stones and solidly pointed with very hard lime mortar, finished smooth on the inside of the curve. This lime is of a different type to that use in the Georgian houses. If part of a full circle, this was estimated to have a diameter of about 5 metres (16 feet). As this was so deep, it was decided to make further investigations once the surface level had been reduced to the construction level required by the builders.

While this surface stripping was being carried out, the excavator pulled out a chunk of similar curved masonry in the back garden of No 3, about five metres uphill. The detailed excavation by hand that followed revealed this to be part of a similar circular structure, which proved to be exactly eight feet (2.44m) in diameter internally and about a foot deep. The base consisted of a paving of small beetle stones, solidly pointed with the same hard white lime mortar. On the south side of the circle, the circular wall increased in height to at least two feet from the base. Unfortunately, this feature was partly destroyed by the construction of the concrete wall separating No 3 from The Blue Lantern. This occurred when the Blue Lantern site was developed as the island's first electricity generator house, built by Solomon's in 1954, initially to power cold stores and later street and navigation lights.



**The remains of what is believed to be Jamestown's first water supply**

Running from the centre of the circular structure was a curved row of redstone slabs, which continued as a redstone water duct leading west, towards the Run. This duct would have had side blocks and cover slabs. The larger basin was not comprehensively excavated, as it had already been severely damaged by later works on the site. Its context and purpose was revealed by the upper basin excavation



**Adam Sizeland: The new Museum curator – on site**

A most likely explanation of these structures is that they were a public water supply, fresh water being carried from further up the valley in a stone channel, running into the upper chamber

where the south wall was raised, probably through some sort of spout, and then falling into the eight foot diameter pool. The early inhabitants would have collected their drinking water from here. The spout would have allowed a pail to be placed beneath, probably on a support structure which has not survived. The basin would have overflowed into the lower 16 foot basin, which would have been used for washing clothes and possibly for personal ablutions and watering animals. It would have been a social centre being situated just south of the church, which was on the same site, built of wood, and often in poor state of repair. Similar water channels existed to carry water from Chubb's Spring to the Wharf for the use of shipping. The Wharf water was stored in tanks which still exist in the barrel-roofed buildings known as the Old Mortuary and the Old Customs Office.

The two basins are immediately beneath the Georgian levels. The system was clearly in use for some time before the houses were built, so a reasonable date would be 1700-1725. It could be earlier. As the first settlers arrived at St Helena in 1659, it could have been built a decade or two after their arrival. It was in public use right up to the time the houses were built, and remained in private use for some time thereafter. The lime sands at Sandy Bay were discovered in 1708. Prior to that date, lime was produced on St Helena by burning English chalk imported for the purpose. It appears to have been burnt using imported coal. The lime mortar used on this site is very white and extremely hard, consistent with this chalk based product, and has small inclusions of coal, which supports this early date.

The Mantis project manager has been so inspired by the discovery that he hopes to make the feature the theme of his hotel. The water fountain may be retained in situ, though this will be difficult as it is currently in the way of the south side wall of the new wing. More likely it will be removed and rebuilt in the bar area. Names such as "The Watering Hole" spring to mind.



**Clearance underway at the rear of site with the church in the background**

The hotel should be completed towards the end of 2017 which should coincide with normal operation of the airport. A concern is the hotel's impact on the already problematic parking arrangements in Lower Jamestown. A minimum need of 30-40 parking spaces is likely. As provision of these is impossible, Land Planning waived the requirement for two parking spaces per room which is being imposed on other potential hotel developers.

The writer proposes that a Swiss tunnelling company be contracted to build an underground carpark accessed by the cliff beside the Museum. It could be on the same level as the Museum carpark and be built large enough to accommodate hundreds of cars. We could then secure the dream of pedestrianising the Grand Parade!

# Historic Departure of the RMS from Tilbury, 14.6.2016 by Edward Baldwin



After a very successful week at the Pool of London, the RMS returned to Tilbury to load cargo. On 14 June she moved to the historic Cruise Terminal, built in 1929, to board passengers for the return voyage to St Helena. She was fully booked, so the terminal hall was very crowded with passengers and many Saints who had come to see off family and friends. The baggage

handlers, accustomed to cruise ship passengers, were astonished at the amount of hold baggage that passengers were handing over. It seemed everyone was determined to use every inch of their one cubic metre hold baggage allowance. AWSM had obviously anticipated this and provided plenty of container space. In the event, when we left, an empty container was left on the quayside. We could have carried even more stuff! A reception had also been arranged for invited guests, including many former members of the RMS's ship's company, to watch the historic departure.



At 3.00pm we boarded ship and soon after the various festivities commenced. While we were going through the usual safety drill, to our surprise the 24th Invicta Marching Band in Royal Marine uniform started to play and march on the quayside. We were able to watch until the rain came on with a vengeance and they retreated to the balcony of the terminal building where the invited guests were being entertained.

When departure time came, the band played traditional sailing tunes, "Hearts of Oak", "Rule Britannia" and so on and two large cannons and several small ones fired clouds of red, white and blue confetti into the air.



The open decks of the ship had been transformed with a riot of red and blue on the white paintwork and furniture. The confetti had adhered to the wet surfaces with memorable effect. It was not until well South of Tenerife that the deck crew managed to eliminate the last persistent traces.

After dinner, a turn on deck revealed that we were heading down the Channel on a beautiful clear evening, the lights of Kent and Calais shining brightly. Ferries were crossing close ahead of us and immediately behind us, leaving no doubt that we were in one of the busiest shipping lanes of the World. And so we were on our way.

Confetti was also launched from the ship in a coordinated volley. As we pulled away from the quayside, there was much waving of flags and cheering, while the band was heard to play "Sailing". Once out into the River, the tugs turned on their fire hoses to provide traditional plumes of water spray, which caught some passengers by surprise on the sundeck. We were all soaked through anyway, so what did a bit more water matter? We could also hear and see the artillery salute being fired in our honour by the gunners at Tilbury Fort. After pausing to allow us all to take in the scene, the RMS then headed down the River as the weather improved and we enjoyed a sunlit evening as the ship pulled out into the estuary, past Chatham, Sheppey, the WWII forts and Richborough.



# Visit of Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1957

Report by the then Education Officer Edgar Wagstaff from St Helena "Wirebird" Feb 1957 (photos by Wagstaff)



A few minutes before sunset on the eve of the Duke's visit, Reggie George could be seen writing the traditional words of welcome on the lower wall of the donkey path above the town. St Helena was then all set for the most important event for ten years in the island's history.

As Britannia sailed into the roadstead even the porpoises played their part by gambolling in front of the bows of the graceful Royal Yacht. Despite the difficulty of using a forty-five foot motor launch to land at the Wharf steps, the royal barge was used to bring His Royal Highness ashore. Previously, Royalty had been forced to use a humble rowing boat like all other visitors, but so skilfully was the barge handled that only a small patch of paintwork was damaged in the process.

The Duke, with his newly grown beard trimmed in contrast to his war-time edition, was obviously in fine fettle and ready to enjoy his visit to our historic Island. After being officially greeted by His Excellency the Governor, Lady Harford and their daughter Priscilla, he shook hands with the Bishop, the Sheriff and Mrs Solomon, members of the councils and their wives.

Using the same car that had been used by His Majesty King George VI when he visited the island accompanied by our present Queen, the Queen Mother and Princess Margaret, His Royal Highness drove past the long line of cheering flag-waving children who lined the route to the Parade Ground. His Excellency then took the Duke to see the Castle, giving all the people who had welcomed His Royal Highness at the Wharf time to return to the main parade. On parade, under the charge of the parade commander, Mr Walter Benjamin of Hutt's Gate, were the organised bodies of ex-servicemen, Boy Scouts, Girl guides, Rangers, Brownies, Red Cross, Salvation Army and the three friendly societies.

Leaving the Castle, His Royal Highness mounted the Courthouse steps and the St Helena Band, conducted by Mr Maurice Young, played the National Anthem. After the inspection of the parade, when His Royal Highness stopped to speak to many of the members of the various contingents, Mr Homfray Solomon as sheriff read the following address of welcome:

**St Helena Connection No 21**

"It is a great joy to the people of St Helena once more to welcome a member of the Royal Family among us. The visit of Her Majesty the Queen as a Princess with her royal parents in 1947 is fresh in the memory of us and is a cherished link with our beloved Sovereign. On behalf of all in St Helena I offer your Royal Highness our best wishes for your health and happiness. We trust that in the short time available to you at this Island in the course of your long voyage, you will be able to feel the deep and affectionate loyalty of all the people of St Helena and that you will enjoy seeing some of the beauties and historical monuments of the Island. We beg that on your return to England Your Royal highness will convey to the Queen the assurance of our unfailing loyalty and devotion to Her Majesty's person and to the Throne. May I now on behalf of all of us present to your Royal Highness, for the Queen and yourself gifts of local work subscribed for by all the people of the Island, and ask you to accept at the hands of two St Helena children presents for the

Duke of Cornwall and Princess Anne."

Mr Solomon then presented the lace table set made by Mrs Phyllis Peters and Miss Audrey Francis of High Hill for the Queen, and an inlaid cigarette box made by the Nicholls family of Barrack Square, for the Duke himself. Nine year old Keith Augustus, son of P.C. Augustus of Alarm Forest, then presented a pencil box, inlaid with the wirebird crest and monogrammed "C", for Prince Charles which was also made by the Nicholls family. A similar pencil box for Princess Anne was then gracefully presented by six year old Thelma George, daughter of Mr and Mrs Owen George of Upper Jamestown.

In reply His Royal Highness spoke these words: "I am most grateful to you, Mr Sheriff, for your words of welcome and to all the people of St Helena for the kind and friendly reception you have given me to-day.

I also want to thank you all for your delightful presents which I shall take home with great pleasure. I am sure they will bring back many happy memories to the Queen of her visit ten years ago. Before I left home in October last year she particularly asked me to convey her best wishes to all her people of St Helena. I have heard a lot about this Island from The Queen, so I am now very happy to be here, and I am looking forward to seeing as much as possible in one short day.

I am very concerned to learn that your flax industry is having grave difficulties. This is particularly serious because, like so many of the islands I have visited, everything depends on one industry. One of the most striking features of the modern world is the speed with which things change. As new discoveries make some things unwanted they nearly always make demands for something new. But, whatever happens no island community can rest easy with all its eggs in one basket or if it is entirely dependent on the outside world. I am happy to learn, therefore, that your Government, with the help of the Government at home, is working hard to find a variety of activities suitable for St Helena. I hope their efforts will be successful, and I can assure you that the Queen and I will watch your progress with interest and sympathy. I wish you all good luck and good fortune for the future."

After leaving the Parade the Duke made a brief visit to the new Hospital where staff were presented, and where he spoke to many of the patients. He returned to open the Island's first Recreation Ground which had been constructed on the site of the old Jamestown graveyard. His Royal Highness noticing the irrepressible children who had been allowed in the Recreation Ground for the first time to witness the opening and who just couldn't wait to use the new swings and slide, said, to the great amusement of the large audience, "You seem to have got me here under false pretences. I came here to open the playing ground and find it already full of children. However, if it will ease your consciences at all, I now declare it open."



Next was Jacob's Ladder which his Royal Highness viewed before inspecting Messrs Ovenstones new fish canning factory and driving to Plantation House in order to change into civilian clothes.

A large crowd was present outside the gates of Longwood Old House and Mrs "Alfie" Joshua led them in giving three loud cheers as his Royal Highness passed between them. From Napoleon's house of exile the Duke then went to the Emperor's empty tomb where he completed the planting of an olive tree.

The cavalcade was moving across Stiches Ridge when His Royal Highness stopped to admire the spectacular view of Sandy Bay. At the Bamboo Hedge Flax Mill, Mr George Moss the Mill's Manager



and Councillor Kenneth Legg, the Mill Foreman, together with some of the Mill staff and many spectators were waiting to greet His Royal Highness.

Here he watched the whole flax milling process, from unloading of the donkeys to the baling of the hemp, with great interest. He admired a picture of the mill painted by one of the staff Mr Percy Williams, and graciously accepted it. Before returning to Plantation House, he made a lightning visit to the A&F Department at Scotland.

After lunch His royal highness drove with his Excellency the Governor to windy Point above West Lodge where he spoke to most of the local residents who were gathered there. On his return he visited Francis Plain where a cricket game was in progress between the Royal Yacht team and an island eleven. The members of the local team were well rewarded for their generous gesture to the visiting ship by being presented to his Royal Highness.

Our Royal visitor was afforded little rest for he then returned to Plantation House where the largest garden party ever to be held on the Island was taking place. Among the three hundred guests were representatives of every aspect of life on the Island, from shepherd to shop-owner and from flax cutter to fisherman. Here His Royal Highness made a point of speaking to as many people who were bred and born on the island as time permitted.

When he arrived at the Wharf in order to return to Britannia, he found most of the Island population waiting there to give him a royal send-off. The Duke responded by continually waving, stopping only to bend down and pop up with a tiny thumb size camera at the ready, in order to take a picture of the cheering crowds to show, we imagine, to our Gracious Queen at a later date.

At eight o'clock prominent St Helenians and members of the government were entertained to a dinner party held on board the Royal Yacht. Soon after the guests returned and at exactly eleven o'clock, a signal gun was fired, and Britannia sailed away, brilliantly illuminated against the dark northern sky.



## A Childhood in Two Boats Village by John Woolven-Allan



### Austin Ten-Four Abandoned in the 1970s at Two Boats as a Play-thing for Children

John Woolven-Allan first went to Ascension in 1973 with his parents. His father, Roger, worked as a radio engineer helping to run the BBC's South Atlantic Relay Station at English Bay. The family lived in Two Boats Village, barring a couple of short leave periods, until 1982. John's father also organised a table tennis league, darts tournaments, was a member of the Ascension Juggers, the BSAC Ascension (scuba), and was editor of the *Islander* for about five years. His mother, Linda, was secretary at Two Boats School and sometime cookery teacher. She painted, and helped lay tracks for the Ascension Hashers in their early days.

I was six in 1976 when we moved to Dampier's Round. The village, nestled between the high russet scoria cones of Travellers Hill, Thistle Hill, and the Sisters peaks, was less than ten years old and our bungalow with its scrawny garden retained an institutional blandness. But those days were great fun, and the village an endless source of excitement. There was a large casuarina, or pom-pom, tree outside and as it shed its marble-sized seed cases, they could be heard inside bouncing on the corrugated tin roof where they would accumulate in the parallel troughs. To the side of the house behind two more pom-pom trees was an electricity substation with an empty unlocked enclosure. Some tea cards which I collected had tips for better soccer skills, and I would practise for ages in the substation, happy in the knowledge that the ball could not escape.

In addition to the ubiquitous pom-pom there was another interesting seed pod that we called a "GG." It was the size of a pea but shaped like a spiked medieval mace head. Designed by nature to stick to the hoofs of ungulate animals, the potential pain delivered to a barefoot child was intense. My friends and I would play a crazy game of running flat out between the road sections of Dampier's Round. The chance of getting across the thirty yards of

dusty scrub was about four in five, so nearly every time half a dozen of us charged across at least one scream would go up, with the luckless victim disappearing into the dust, or somehow managing to hop, bloodied, to the finishing tarmac.

I used to walk, or run, barefoot to school along a well-trodden track between the yellow boys and prickly pears, now long overwhelmed by thorny scrub. School was very enjoyable, and I was soon introduced to "tooters" which was what everyone called marbles.



### Pom pom tree in Dampier's Round

"Tooters" was the main business that filled our play time. The game, played by all boys and some girls both in and out of school, involved smoothing out a circle of dirt about a yard in diameter, with a perimeter trench excavated by a finger, and a hole dug in the centre the size of an egg cup. The game involved rolling marbles

into the hole, and throwing, darts-style, alleys with the aim of hitting opponents' marbles. Collections could be won or lost over an afternoon.

The children from Georgetown would arrive each morning at school on the "Dragon," an old grey articulated bus, which I always pictured parked at English Bay beach whenever we sang "Puff the Magic Dragon." The RAF bombed the school once; a hessian sack of sweets was shoved out the back of a Hercules which flew about fifty feet overhead. We screamed out of the classroom once the aerial manna had landed.

After school I would have tea at home, and following that, and until the street lights came on around seven o'clock, was play time. I would usually stay close to the bungalow, or that of a friend, because "foosers" could be played anywhere. Some evenings we would visit the Two Boats Club where my father would socialise with his friends in the bar, and my brother and I would watch films (British children's TV programmes) projected on a big screen in the hall. On non-film nights we would tear round the grounds with our friends pretending to be soldiers, sometimes straying down the slope at the back of the club, below the swimming pool, to the Ocean View Club, which appeared an abandoned replica of the Two Boats Club. From here we could see down across the lowland plains to Cross Hill and the western Atlantic Ocean.

At weekends, if we didn't go to the beach, or Green Mountain, all day was playtime. For a time the hard rocky plateau behind the CSO building, on the north side of the village, was our default destination. The geology here was challenging, and we made a den on a ledge accessible only by shimmying around a small cliff face – easy enough, but nowhere a grown-up would ever go. The area was habitat for geckos, and for some time we all collected their eggs and incubated them in matchboxes in our airing cupboards until they hatched.

If we couldn't organise a more imaginative trip there were always the two sand pits. Many hours were spent at the bottom sand pit, which is still in use today, although the concrete bases to the equipment are gone. A good game back then was to arc the swing as high as possible and jump with the aim of clearing the concrete foundation! The top sand pit is all but gone. Where today there is a small sea of aloes and yellow boys, we played on a concrete drain section, an old wooden see-saw, a yellow metal climbing frame, and in the storm drain which linked the sandpit to the school car park. Beyond the top sand pit, and just over the cattle grid outside the school, was the football pitch, with its backdrop of Green Mountain. This area, once the site of the US Army's field hospital, was quite a trek, but occasionally we would get there in numbers, both English and St Helenians, and spend the time chasing a ball which was always the same red-brown colour as the dust.



### Football Pitch – Thistle Hill in the Rear

Over the road from the football pitch, at the foot of Travellers Hill, was an unused piece of land which had many gullies and spurs. Here we fashioned a "scrambling" course for our bicycles in the soft grey volcanic ash, with jumps and banked corners which could only be taken at speed. This was only with my English friends; the St Helenian boys didn't have bikes as a rule.

Rarely a small group of us would get permission from our parents to go out all day. Packing picnic lunches, the best part of which was my mother's coffee gateau, we would head out even further than the football pitch. A favourite destination was the "Two Boats" at the foot of Green Mountain, gateway to the ruined Dampier's Drip settlement in the valley beyond. Dampier's was spooky with its old cave dwellings, but I was rewarded here with finding old Royal Marines brass tunic buttons. Our other favourite site was at Hospital Hill south of the football pitch, which was free of thorn bushes back then. We smoothed out a steep slope in the trachyte hillside, and with cardboard boxes liberated from behind the Two Boats shop, we fashioned a hair-raising ride. Here, also, I found an old pearl-handled penknife which probably belonged to a US soldier.

Two Boats Village hasn't fundamentally changed. It has aged well and become greener. Clay roof tiles have replaced the corrugated tin, and a greater portion of residents are now St Helenian. The perimeter fence seems to have failed since when I looked out the window, on the mornings of my most recent trip, there were sheep in the front garden.



Top Sand Pit



The Author's Brother Richard c.1979 at Top Sand Pit

## Wirebirds on the up? Highest recorded annual census

This year's annual Wirebird census has shown an increasing population trend

Each year the National Trust, working with volunteers, carries out an island wide count of the Wirebird population. The census provides information about how well the population is doing over time; with long term trends in the population size helping to identify whether conservation management efforts are being effective.

The 2016 Wirebird census was led by Eddie Duff and Kevin George. This year an astounding 559 adult Wirebirds were counted, *the highest ever recorded adult count*. At the same time, 86 juveniles, 52 chicks and 55 nests were also recorded



Image courtesy of Christina Stroud

Wirebirds are predominantly found in two main habitats on St Helena: dry, mid-altitude pasture and semi-desert areas. In these areas the grass or other broadleaved herbs are low in height and with some bare ground. They also like open views to help early detection of approaching predators.

The census, which covers 31 locations around the island, was first started in 1988/9 and has been carried out annually since 2005/6 during which time the number of adults, juveniles, chicks and nests is recorded. The census is carried out in January each year, mid breeding season, so most birds will be 'tied' to their nest territory and unlikely to move very far away.

Wirebird numbers in locations that have been under active predator control and pasture management have shown an increase in numbers. Deadwood Plain recorded the highest number of Wirebirds since 1988/9 at 106. Rather surprisingly numbers of Wirebirds have continued to improve in Prosperous, despite the disruption from the airport project.

The National Trust has been carrying out a programme of predator monitoring and control at the core Wirebird sites of Deadwood, Man and Horse and Upper Prosperous since 2011. The Trust has been supported in this work with grants from the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), DFID's Overseas Territories Environment Programme and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB).

Since 2012 and throughout the construction of the Airport, Basil Read has also carried out a programme of predator monitoring and control at Prosperous Bay Plain and Prosperous Bay North.

## Death of Myrtle



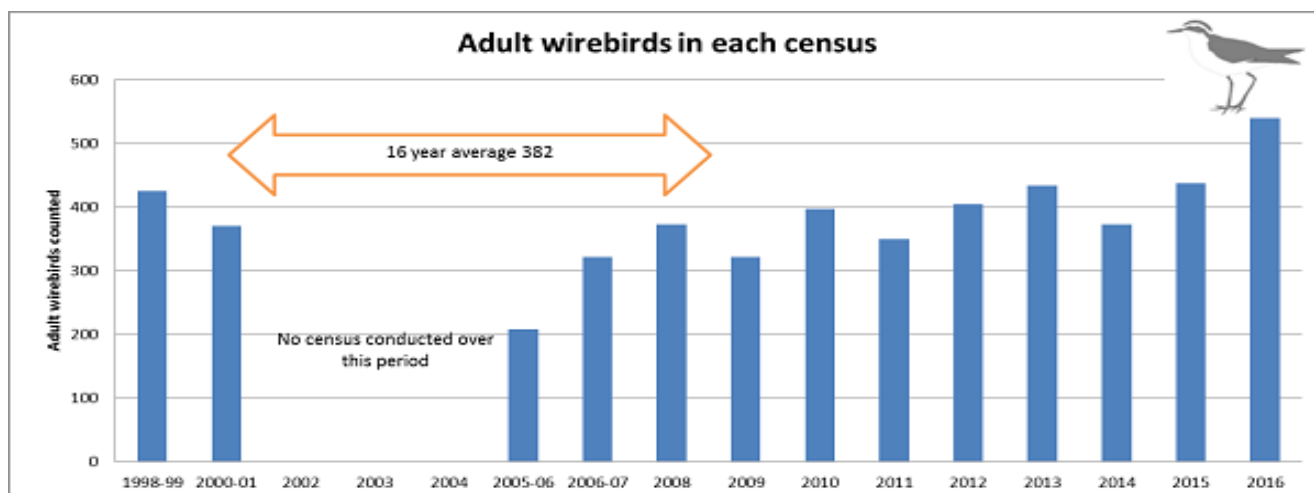
Plantation House tortoise Myrtle - the smallest of the group of five - passed away on Tuesday night, 5 July 2016, despite the best efforts of Plantation staff and veterinary staff.

In consultation with previous Senior Veterinary Officer, Joe Hollins, the cause of death is believed to be a female orientated obstetrical problem combined with kidney failure. This

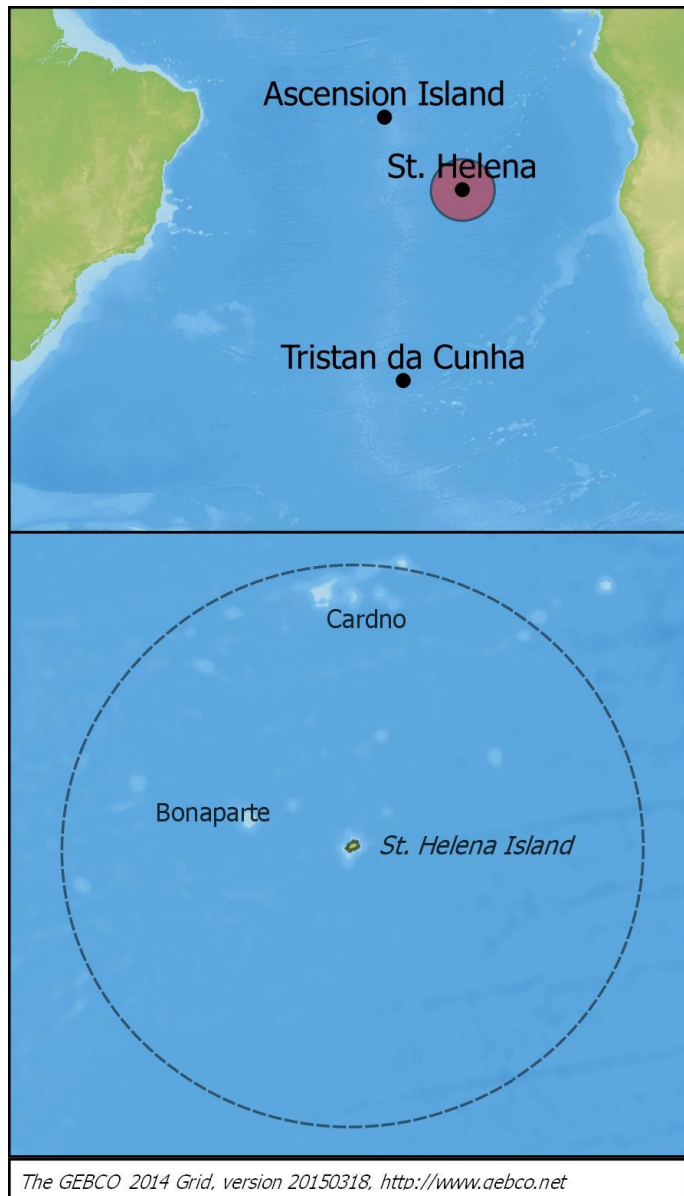
is important, as it rules out any contagious problem which might have had implications for the other tortoises.

Large 'stones' found inside Myrtle's body were in fact calcified groups of eggs which were blocking her reproductive tract, likely causing egg peritonitis. This, combined with high urea levels - caused by kidney failure - appears to be the cause of death.

Having arrived to the Island in 1972, Myrtle was believed to be approximately 70 years of age at time of death. She will be buried in the Plantation House Paddock, on the Island which has been her home for 44 years.



# A Marine Park for St Helena



A 200 nautical mile zone around St Helena has been designated a Marine Protected Area (MPA) as was announced at the 2016 'Our Ocean' Conference hosted by US Secretary of State John Kerry in Washington DC on 15th September.

The MPA is a significant step forward for St Helena to meet both local and international commitments and to protect maritime interests. The area is defined and recognised legally and requires dedicated management to achieve conservation of the area and the industries it supports (fishing, minerals, tourism etc).

The UK will provide £20 million over four years for implementation, management, surveillance and crucially the enforcement of new MPAs in the OTs. This will allow St Helena to access more effective enforcement. A new Fisheries Ordinance and licensing policy will improve management and a dedicated marine fisheries enforcement post will support compliance.

St Helena's fishing industry principally targets highly migratory tuna which travel vast distances, so need to be managed in co-operation with other countries. To achieve this, St Helena (through the UK) is a member of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tuna (ICCAT), which manages Atlantic tuna stocks.

All commercial fish catches are landed at Rupert's, recorded and sent to ICCAT who gauge the migrating stock. Data are also collected to understand growth patterns. A tuna tagging scheme is underway which will show how tuna move around the ocean.

Satellite monitoring will be used to determine if there is a problem with illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing in the MPA. The most likely locations for illegal vessels are the seamounts that are fished by St Helena boats. They are required to report sightings of other vessels. If necessary, St Helena can use offshore boats to undertake specific patrols. Reports of illegal fishing are passed to the FCO Marine & Fisheries Division for follow-up with the relevant countries.

The declaration of the MPA means that there is now a clear framework to ensure the sustainable management of the island's marine resources. Traditional fishing methods will not be affected.

## Restoring Bertrand's Cottage



On 20<sup>th</sup> October 1816, Napoleon's *aide-de-camp*, Grand Marshal Henri-Gatien Bertrand moved into his newly built home, Bertrand's Cottage. On 20<sup>th</sup> October 2016, to mark the bicentenary, the newly restored guesthouse and training facility held an open day for the public to enjoy a preview prior to the official opening in December.

The restoration project was initiated by Enterprise St Helena following the transfer of the building from SHG. The open day was also an opportunity for the public to visit the neighbouring Longwood Enterprise Park, currently under re-development. The two, along with Longwood House and the General's Quarters, will form a key business, social and tourism hub as well as providing much-needed visitor accommodation

The day began with speeches of welcome from Robert Midwinter, Director of Policy Development and Social Enterprise, Anthony Thomas, ESH Board Member and Michael Harper, ESH Trainer and Assessor; following which visitors were given a tour of the house showing the Ebony Restaurant, upskilling kitchen, Bertrand's Dining Area, sitting areas and bedrooms.

Guests were also shown progress at the Longwood Enterprise Park and were able to view some of the units that will shortly become available for local businesses.

Renovation works commenced at Bertrand's Cottage on 13<sup>th</sup> October 2015, following a ground breaking ceremony held as part of the Napoleonic Bicentenary commemorations.

Once the facility has officially been opened Bertrand's Cottage will provide three double en-suite bedrooms along with a restaurant capable of catering for up to 24 guests

The property will also act as an upskilling and training centre for St Helena's food industry, helping to deliver high quality, relevant hospitality training (kitchen, restaurant and accommodation) according to the needs of the existing and future hospitality and catering businesses on the island.

From St Helena Tourism